

## The Voyage of Discovery: Sacagawea



Sacagawea was a Native American (Shoshone) woman who accompanied the expedition from the Mandan Villages on. Here she's interpreted in a bronze sculpture by Eugene Daub located at Clark's Point in Kansas City. Source - NET, Bill Ganzel.

Imagine being a young teenage Indian girl married to a French Canadian over 40 years old who won you as a result of a bet with some Indians who, in turn, had captured you from your own tribe. Then imagine becoming pregnant and accompanying your husband and a band of, mainly, white men on an 8,000-mile expedition for 28 months into some of America's most treacherous territories. Such was the fate of Sacagawea, a member of the Shoshone tribe, who had been taken prisoner by members of the Hidatsa tribe. Her husband, Toussaint Charbonneau, was an independent trader who lived among the Hidatsas. Lewis and Clark accepted Charbonneau's offer to sign on as an interpreter, not so much because of his abilities, but because of his wife, Sacagawea. Sacagawea spoke Shoshone as well as Hidatsas, and a little French.

Sacagawea played a very important role in the success of the expedition, not as a guide as she's been described, but rather as a person who could read the landscape fairly well. She could read the rivers the valleys. She had a sense of what the landscapes said about direction, where they were, and where they were going. She also had a sense of what could be eaten along the way as well as finding food. Her service as an interpreter proved invaluable when she negotiated with the Shoshone for horses. Without those horses, who knows what would have happened to the expedition.

On August 17, 1806 as Lewis and Clark prepared to return to St. Louis and "settled up" with Charbonneau. He received approximately \$500 for his horse, his tepee, and his services. Needless to say, Sacagawea received nothing.

Unfortunately, there is a sad ending to the story of Sacagawea; although, there seem to be a variety of interpretations of what the final story was. One account indicates she eventually moves to St. Louis. Sacagawea was a citizen of the West, but someone who had citizenship

no place else. Where did she belong — in a Hidatsa village, with her Shoshone relatives, in St. Louis? Where was her home? The last glimpses we have of her are in 1811 when a traveler described her as a woman wearing the cast off clothing of white women, drifting through St. Louis, seemingly alone, having given up her children to the care of William Clark. Regardless of the various accounts of what happened to Sacagawea after the expedition, it appears most are in agreement that she died in approximately 1812 when she would have been in her early twenties. If ever there was a displaced person, it was Sacagawea. An orphan in a world made by the expedition.

Clark did pay tribute to Sacagawea in a letter to Charbonneau referring to her as, "Your woman who accompanied you that long dangerous and fatiguing rout to the Pacific Ocean and back disserved a greater reward for her attention and services on that route than we had in our power to offer her."

### **The Voyage of Discovery: An African American in the Corps**

A black man by the name of York accompanied the Lewis and Clark expedition as a slave to Clark. He had been a childhood companion to William Clark and made invaluable contributions to the expedition on many occasions. Clark reported that York was especially attentive to Sergeant Floyd during his final days. York also risked his life to save Clark in a flash flood on the Missouri River near Great Falls in present-day Montana.



Detail from E. S. Paxson's 1912 Painting,  
"Lewis and Clark at Three Forks," York depicted on the left.  
Source - Montana Historical Society.

York participated in the hunts to bring game to the camp. He helped put up tents, managed sails, and helped with the rowing. In short, he did all the things that everyone else did. He made his contributions and was part of the team.

York was also a curiosity to the Indians. Most had never seen a black man. They were intrigued by his color and there is the story about a Mandan chief trying to rub the black off of York's skin. Yet the Indians loved York. They respected him. Indian children and women frequently followed him around because of his powerful build and his uniqueness.

Make no mistake, York was not a servant, but a slave owned by William Clark. However, for a brief period in his life, York was relatively "free." He had his own rifle and got to vote on matters related to the expedition. He was a full member of the expedition.

Think what it must have been like for York to re-enter a world of slavery after the expedition. To Clark's credit, he eventually arranged for York's legal freedom. But think what it would be like to be an African American free man in a world surrounded by race and slavery. You are free only because a piece of paper states you are free. At heart you are always on the edge of respectability, on the edge of freedom.



### SEAMAN - LEWIS' NEWFOUNDLAND DOG

(You are here)

Lewis purchased the Newfoundland dog for \$20.00 in 1803

Man's best friend accompanied the expedition and alerted the Discovery Team of unexpected guests.

From the Journals of Meriwether Lewis:

**April 22, 1805 :** " walking on shore this evening I met with a buffaloe calf which attached itself to me and continued to follow close at my heels untill I embarked and left it. It appeared allarmed at my dog which was probably the cause of it's so readily attaching itself to me"

 [Map PLUS Lewis and Clark timeline of region \(PDF\)](#)

**May 29, 1805:** Some were curious "last night we were all allarmed by a large buffaloe bull, when he came near the tent, my dog saved us by causing him to change his course"

**June 27, 1805 :**" a bear came within thirty yards of our camp last night and eat up about thirty weight of buffaloe suit which was hanging on a pole, my dog seems to be in a constant state of alarm with these bears and keeps barking all night"

As the Corps explored the Louisiana Purchase, Lewis' dog was quickly adopted by the crew and became known as "Our Dog".

<http://www.pbs.org/lewisandclark/inside/seaman.html>



In preparing for the expedition, Lewis visited President Jefferson's scientific friends in Philadelphia for instructions in natural sciences, astronomical navigation and field medicine. It is believed that it was during this period that Lewis, for "20\$" purchased Seaman, his "dogg of the newfoundland breed" to accompany him to the Pacific.

Although Lewis left unsaid his reason for selecting a Newfoundland, he may have been impressed with the breed of dog first publicized in *British Quadrupeds*, a 1790 work authored by Sir Thomas Bewick. Honoring its place of origin, the breed was appropriately named Newfoundland. Lewis may have been influenced in selecting Seaman by the breed's reputation of size, strength and swimming abilities, together with Bewick's mention of "the great sagacity of this new member of the dog world." Bewick accompanied his commentary with an engraving that represented the breed as black and white, later to be known as a Landseer.



Newfoundland Dog

The dog is mentioned frequently in the journals, including Lewis's praise of the "sagacity" of Seaman, but nowhere in any of the explorers' original manuscript journals is the color of Lewis's dog given. Nevertheless, scholarly and fictional post-expedition literature alike mention the dog unequivocally as "black." It is uncertain when today's preferred solid colors of Newfoundlands were developed.

In 1916, the dog's name, Seaman, through historian error in deciphering the journalists' poorly formed words in their longhand manuscript journals, resulted in the popular but erroneous name, Scannon. It was not until 1987 when the late Donald Jackson, a leading research historian, published his documentary findings in his *Among the Sleeping Giants* that the dog's name was proved rightly to be Seaman. This matter is treated in detail

under Captain Lewis's journal entry for July 5, 1806, below.

The dog appears in Captain Meriwether Lewis's journal virtually from the outset of the explorer's departure from Pittsburgh, August 30, 1803. Navigating down the Ohio River, Lewis, wrote on September 11, "[T]he squirrell appears in great abundance on either side of the river. I made my dog take as many each day as I had occasion for, they wer fat and I thought them when fryed a pleasent food." On November 16, near the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, Lewis mentioned that an encampment of Shawnee and Delaware Indians were encountered. "[O]ne of the Shawnees a respectable looking Indian offered me three beverskins for my dog with which he appeared much pleased...I prised much for his docility and qualifications generally for my journey and of course there was no bargain."

The dog is not listed in the roster of the party that embarked up the Missouri River from its 1803-1804 winter staging area at Camp Dubois, May 14, 1804. The only documentary clue that he was present at the time is contained in an existing scrap of an interleaf page, preceding the May 14, 1804 ,first entry in Sergeant Charles Floyd's tattered longhand journal. The note states cryptically, "[O]ur dog"

Seaman next appears in Captain Clark's journal entry dated August 25, 1804, "Capt Lewis & my Self Concluded to go and See the Mound which was viewed with Such turrow [terror] by all the different Nations in this quarter...which the Indians Call Mountain of little people or Spirits . . . at six miles our Dog was So Heeted & fatigued we was obliged Send him back to the Creek."

The dog was not mentioned during the Fort Mandan winter. He next enters the scenario on April 22, 1805, during the continuation of the Pacific bound explorers. Lewis recorded: "[W]alking on shore this evening I met with a buffaloe calf which attached itself to me and continued to follow close at my heels untill I embarked [board a boat] and left it. it appeared alarmed at my dog which was probably the cause of it's so readily attaching itself to me." April 25, Lewis expressed his attachment to Seaman. "We set out at an early hour. the water friezed on the oars this morning as the men rowed...my dog had been absent during the last night, and I was fearfull we had lost him altogether, however, much to my satisfaction he joined us at 8 Oclock this morning."

On May 19, Lewis had more cause for concern over his dog: "One of the party wounded a beaver, and my dog as usual swam in to catch it; the beaver bit him through the hind leg and cut the artery; it was with great difficulty that I could stop the blood; I fear it will yet prove fatal to him."

Fortunately, Seaman regained his vigor rapidly. Ten days later, on May 29, he was performing guard duty. Clark wrote: "In the last night we were alarmed by a Buffalow which Swam from the opposit Shore landed [by] the Perogue [next to the tipi] in which Capt Lewis & my Self were [sleeping]...and Crossed the perogue...our Dog flew out & he changed his course & passed without doeing more damage than bend a rifle & brakeing hir Stock and injureying one of the blunder busts in the perogue as he passed

through.”

On June 27, while the explorers were portaging 18 miles overland around the Great Falls of the Missouri, Lewis wrote that “a bear came within thirty yards of our camp last night and eat up about thirty weight of buffaloe suit [suet] which was hanging on a pole. my dog seems to be in a constant state of alarm with these bear and keeps barking all night.”

On July 15, beyond the falls, Seaman’s strength as a swimmer was demonstrated. Lewis recorded that “Dreywer [Drouillard] wounded a deer which ran into the river. my dog pursued caught it drowned it and brought it to shore at our camp.” On July 26, Lewis wrote that the party encountered a “...species of grass, the dry seeds of which are armed with a barb [that] penetrate our mockersins and leather legings and give us great pain untill they are removed. my poor dog suffers with them excessively, he is constantly binting and scratching himself in a rack of pain.”

By August 17, the explorers had reached the Missouri system’s upper limit of navigation on a tributary they named “Jefferson’s River, in honor of that illustrious personage, Thomas Jefferson, the author of our enterprise.” Lewis, with three of his men, had crossed the Continental Divide at modern Lemhi Pass, and made contact with Sacagawea’s people, identified today as the Lemhi Shoshoni. At a site they named “Camp Fortunate,” they assembled the Indians, and opened discussions to trade for horses and obtain a guide to pass through the Rocky and Bitterroot Mountains. Lewis remarked, “[E]very article about us appeared to excite astonishment in ther minds; the apperance of the men, their arms, the canoes, our manner of working them, the black man york and the segacity of my dog.”

Between August 17, 1805, and July 5, 1806, the journals are silent as to the activities of Seaman, even over the 1805-1806 Fort Clatsop winter. During the return journey, Lewis, enroute to the Great Falls of the Missouri, explored a shortcut that the captains had learned about from Indians. Lewis’ route would extend from near modern Missoula, Montana, east through the Continental Divide of the Rockies at present Lewis and Clark pass, then on to the falls. On July 5 he “saw two swan in this beautiful Creek...” and proceeded on “3 miles to the entrance of a large creek 20 yds. wide [which I] Called Seamans’ Creek.”

In discovering this spelling of the dog’s name, Dr. Jackson, commenting in his book, *Among the Sleeping Giants*, wrote: “No person named Seaman is known to have been associated with the lives of either captain, and as a common term the word seems strangely nautical in view of its location. When it became necessary for Lewis and Clark to name a creek, river, or other geographical feature, they were predictably direct and simple in their choices...They usually went straight to the heart of the matter and chose a sound, reasonable name for the simplest of reasons: to commemorate a member or sponsor of the expedition.”

“It occurred to me that the name might be a garbled version of Scannon’s Creek, in honor of the faithful dog. The dog had been with Lewis on that side trip, and no geographical

feature had yet been named for him during the entire expedition. I consulted microcopies of the journals held by the American Philosophical Society, half suspecting I would find that Seaman's Creek was actually Scannon's Creek. What I learned instead was mildly startling. The stream was named Seaman's Creek because the dog's name was Seaman." Today, the stream is named Monture Creek.

Proceeding on to the Great Falls, Lewis remarked on July 7, "Reubin Fields wounded a moos deer this morning near our camp. my dog much worried." On July 15, Lewis recorded the last words to be found the journals concerning Seaman. "[T]he musquetoos continue to infest us in such manner that we can scarcely exist; for my own part I am confined by them to my bier at least 3/4 th of the time. my dog even howls with the torture he experiences from them." It is unclear whether Seaman traveled the last leg of the journey down the Missouri River to St. Louis. No post-expedition primary documentation has been found linking a Newfoundland dog to the exploring enterprise.